60p

THE Unexplained

MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

Enfield on trial
The man they couldn't hang
Was Christ married?
Catastrophe theory
Life copies art

123

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THE Unexplained
MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

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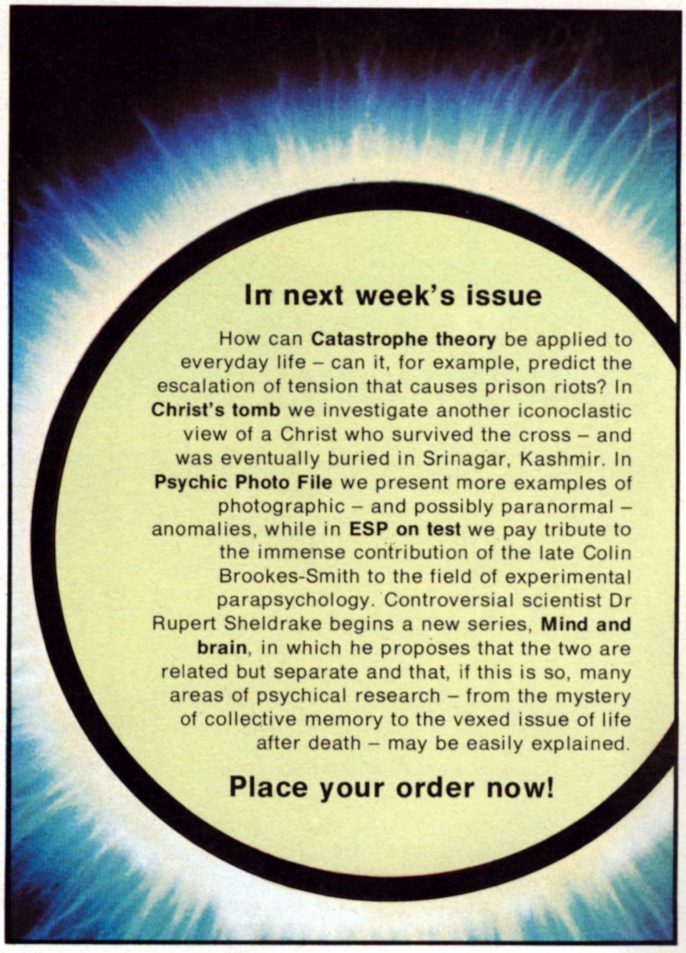
In next week's issue
How can **Catastrophe theory** be applied to everyday life – can it, for example, predict the escalation of tension that causes prison riots? In **Christ's tomb** we investigate another iconoclastic view of a Christ who survived the cross – and was eventually buried in Srinagar, Kashmir. In **Psychic Photo File** we present more examples of photographic – and possibly paranormal – anomalies, while in **ESP on test** we pay tribute to the immense contribution of the late Colin Brookes-Smith to the field of experimental parapsychology. Controversial scientist Dr Rupert Sheldrake begins a new series, **Mind and brain**, in which he proposes that the two are related but separate and that, if this is so, many areas of psychical research – from the mystery of collective memory to the vexed issue of life after death – may be easily explained.
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Crisis upon crisis

An esoteric field of mathematics with the striking name of 'catastrophe theory' has been hailed as a new key to the understanding of many baffling aspects of reality. HILDI HAWKINS explains and assesses the theory

IT IS RARE FOR AN ABSTRUSE branch of mathematics to gain any public attention, much less find itself featured in television programmes and news magazines and debated equally keenly by popular pundits and academics from a wide range of disciplines. Such, however, was the reception accorded in the 1970s to a new discipline largely created by a French mathematician, René Thom. In 1972 Thom published an epoch-making textbook with the forbidding title *Structural stability and morphogenesis*. But to the mathematical field he was exploring he gave a more arresting name: 'catastrophe theory'.

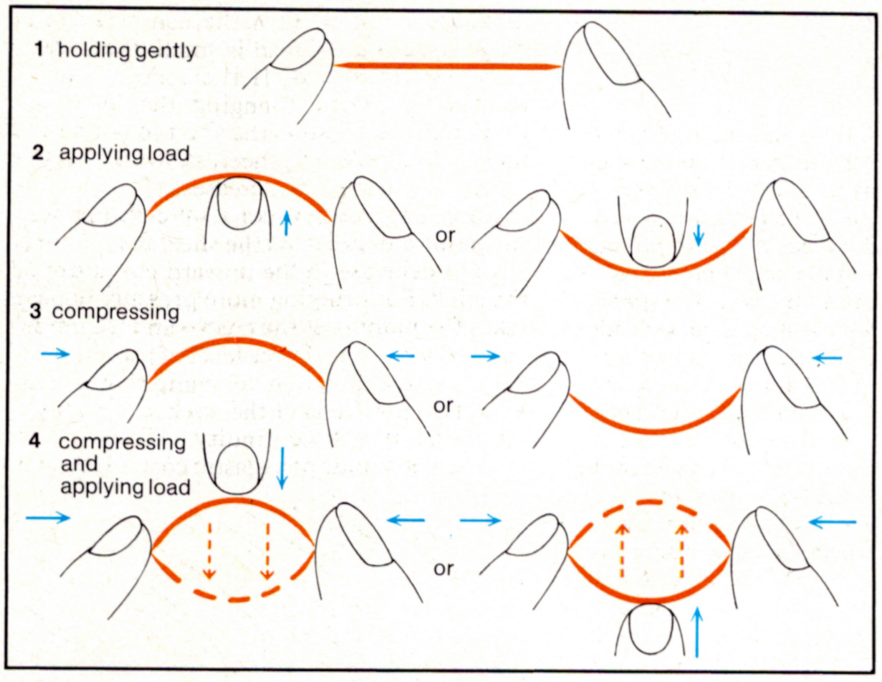
This name undoubtedly contributed to the public interest that stirred a few years later. An additional stimulus to the popular imagination was the fact that serious attempts were being made by distinguished scientists to apply Thom's theory to a vast range of dramatic topics, cutting across all established scientific boundaries, and they included catastrophes as usually understood: earthquakes, failures of building components under stress, mental breakdowns, sudden outbreaks of war – even the swarming of locusts.

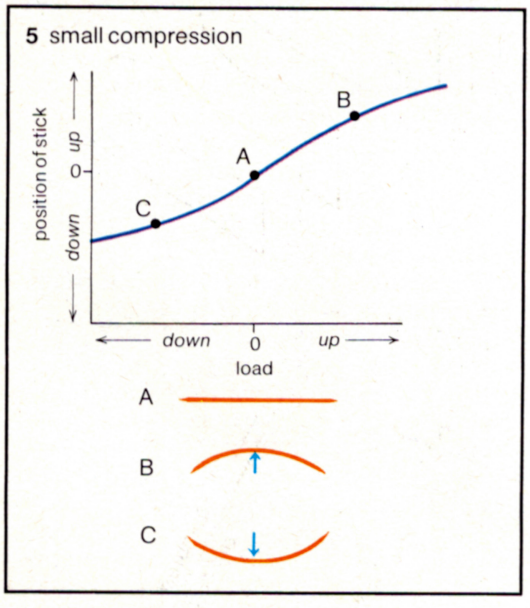
The Tacoma Narrows Bridge collapses into the waters of Puget Sound, Washington, USA, in 1940. A gale had set up strong vibrations that the bridge could not withstand. The failure of materials under stress is one of the host of topics to which catastrophe theory, created by René Thom (below), has been applied

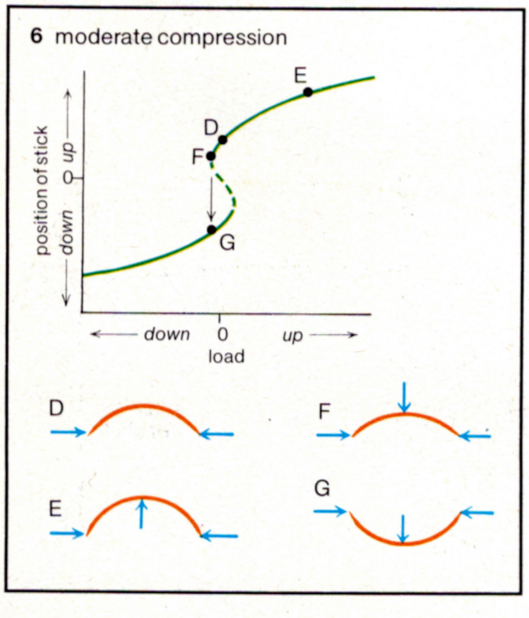
But many processes – physical, biological and psychological – that were less 'catastrophic' but equally abrupt, discontinuous and unpredictable were being analysed with the aid of the new mathematical technique: the sudden 'flip' of a dog's behaviour from cowering to attack; the sudden shift of perception in an optical illusion; the 'getting' of a joke; the sudden collapse of morale in a fighting unit.

Interest in catastrophe theory was stimulated by the zeal of some of its academic enthusiasts. Opposed to these there were equally vocal detractors, who regarded the claims being made for catastrophe theory as inflated. The divisions among academics stemmed from the unfamiliar nature of this new mathematics. Many hoped that it would throw fresh light on problems that conventional scientific method regarded as intractable – including the riddles of paranormal phenomena, in which physical law seems to give way, unpredictably and discontinuously, to the unknown.

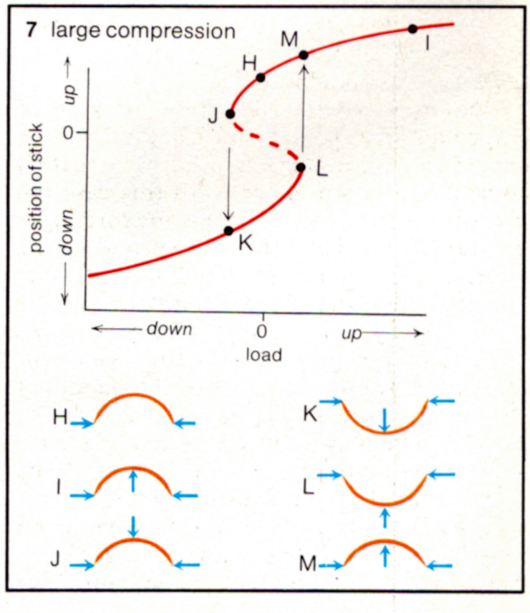
The mathematics that underlies modern science was born in an age in which physical processes were conceived of in terms of smooth continuous change. The development of the infinitesimal calculus by Isaac Newton (1642–1727) and the German philosopher Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716) provided a powerful and elegant tool for describing and analysing the minutest variations in the smooth progress of the planets in their orbits around the Sun, the turbulent but







A plastic cocktail stick demonstrates a 'catastrophe' – an abrupt flip in behaviour. Hold the stick lightly (1). It can take up a range of positions when pressed up or down (2). But when it is slightly compressed, pushing it causes it to snap back and forth between two positions (3). If it is compressed more strongly, more force is needed to make it flip (4). The graphs (5–7) summarise this. At A, the stick is held gently and not bent at all (5). Pushing upwards flexes the stick upwards slightly (B), while a downward push has the opposite effect (C). When there is some compression (6), even with no upward or downward push, the stick is flexed – say upward (D). An upward push causes a small increase in the stick's curvature (E). A downward push (moving to the left of D in the graph) scarcely changes the shape – until it is so strong (F) that there is a sudden jump to a downward curvature (G). When the stick is more strongly compressed (7) a bigger downward push is required to flip the stick (J–K). Pushing the stick upwards will not cause the stick to flip until the point L is reached. Similar graphs describe the behaviour of stressed beams in buildings



steady flow of a river, and the gradual growth of a crystal.

The next few centuries saw modifications and refinements to their method, but there was little doubt in anyone's mind that it was essentially the right way of describing the physical world. Given time, the whole of physics – and every other science – would become as precise, orderly and predictive as celestial mechanics.

All along, however, one of the basic ideas behind Newtonian physics had conflicted with everyday experience. For is it true that all change is continuous? Bubbles burst, water changes abruptly into ice and, on the subatomic level, the research of the 20th century has shown us that change is often sudden and discontinuous: electrons jump abruptly from one energy level to another, with no transition in between (see page 855). Is it really reasonable to approach phenomena such as these using a mathematics that is designed to describe continuous change?

René Thom believes that abrupt changes in the forms of both processes and objects cannot be handled in that way; yet an understanding of such changes is essential to an understanding of the way the world works. For him it is the proper aim of science to describe what he calls the Universe's 'ceaseless creation, evolution and destruction of forms'.

Mathematicians generally work with long chains of reasoning involving many equations. So does Thom, but he uses them to show that pictures – mathematical ones, but pictures nonetheless – can represent the behaviour of physical systems. For he believes that the capacity to form pictures is vital to our understanding of physical processes. He believes that explanations in terms of pictures are much more easily accessible to our minds than those that merely use number and equations. And Christopher Zeeman of Warwick University, a leading exponent of catastrophe theory, puts it this way:

> The way our brains are made, we are accustomed to thinking at the same time as looking, and so it is quite possible to think deeply about new concepts while retaining pictures of graphs in the mind. It is quite the opposite with numbers – our brains are not designed to think originally and manipulate numbers simultaneously.

For Thom, 'The dilemma posed to all scientific explanation is this: magic or geometry.' An explanation without a picture is no explanation at all.

Catastrophe theory is qualitative, not quantitative. It could not, for example, make predictions as to when an event may happen – but it could tell us what is likely to happen at *some* point in the future. In some ways this is a limitation – but it also allows us to form judgements, draw parallels and make *vague* predictions in circumstances in which orthodox science cannot make *any*, because it cannot begin to make sense of the data.

To illustrate catastrophe theory, it is useful to consider a very simple example. Take a plastic cocktail stick. Hold it gently between the thumb and forefinger of the left hand. Now, with the forefinger of the other hand, apply a gentle upward pressure. The stick will bend slightly. Press harder with the forefinger and the stick will bend more. The stick can be flexed in either direction by pressing it in that direction.

In a favoured position

Now apply some pressure with the thumb and forefinger. The stick will bend in one direction – upwards, say. Press down on it with the forefinger of the other hand and the stick's shape will hardly change. Press harder, and the stick will still resist – until suddenly it snaps into a different position, now curved downwards. You cannot, while applying this amount of compression, induce the stick to take up an intermediate shape – there are two 'favoured' positions, with a discontinuous change between them. By contrast, when the stick was only lightly compressed, it could take up any of a continuous range of shapes.

This is a classic example of the kind of behaviour with which catastrophe theory is concerned. The cocktail stick is a system controlled by two factors – in this case the pressure exerted by the thumb and forefinger of your left hand and the load exerted by the forefinger of your right hand. Catastrophe theory states that in any system that is controlled by two variables and that shows sudden jumps in its behaviour ('catastrophes'), the graph of all the possible modes of behaviour (in this case the positions of the stick) will be of just one type – looking like a sheet containing a single simple 'pleat'. René Thom calls this a cusp catastrophe.

Visualising the movement of a point on the sheet will illustrate how the graph represents the behaviour of the system. (See diagram 9.) At point A the compression is very slight and the load is small: the stick is only slightly bowed. If the compression is increased without changing the load, the point will move across the sheet to point D. It moves up the sloping sheet, showing that the bending of the stick increases. If the load is increased at this new constant compression, the point moves across the sheet to F: there is a slight decrease in the upward curvature of the stick. But bringing more pressure to bear takes the point past the cusp – and it 'jumps' suddenly onto the lower level of the sheet, G. For this combination of compression and load, two positions of the stick are possible, separated by a discontinuity.

The behaviour of a plastic cocktail stick is

A three-dimensional graph consisting of a folded sheet helps to make the simplest, 'cusp', catastrophe, which describes a host of physical and biological processes, easier to grasp. The graph representing a cocktail stick's behaviour can be built up from the graphs opposite. They can be stacked one behind another (8), with each graph's position in the series representing the amount of compression to which the stick is subjected. The result is a folded surface (9). If the stick is subjected to varying loads while it is under different amounts of compression the blue, green and red curves result. Under very low compression (blue) there is no catastrophe. At stronger compressions (green and red), jumps in behaviour appear (F–G and J–K); for each one there is a corresponding reverse jump, such as L–M

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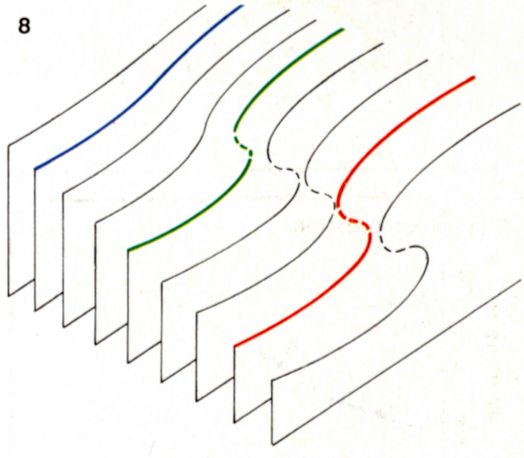

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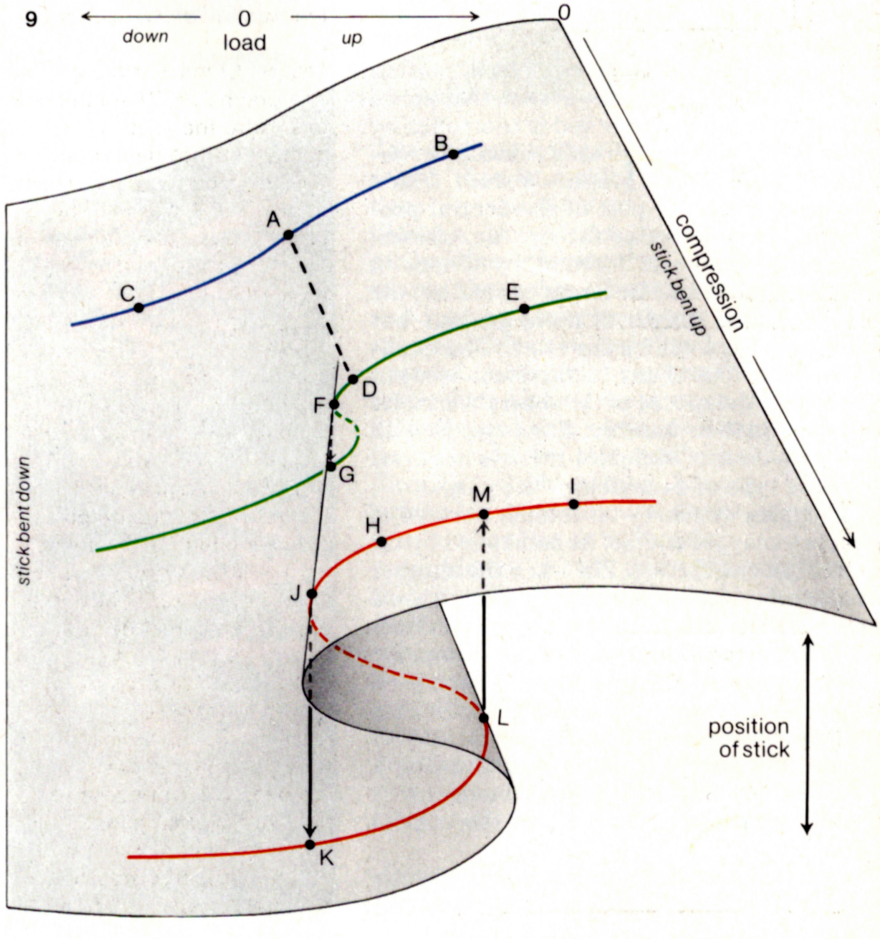
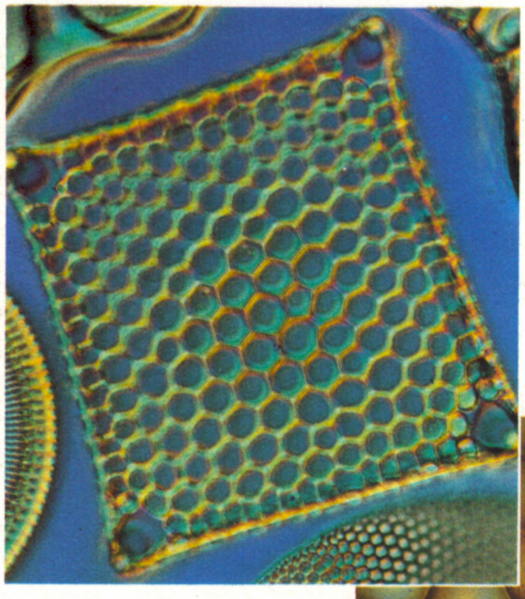
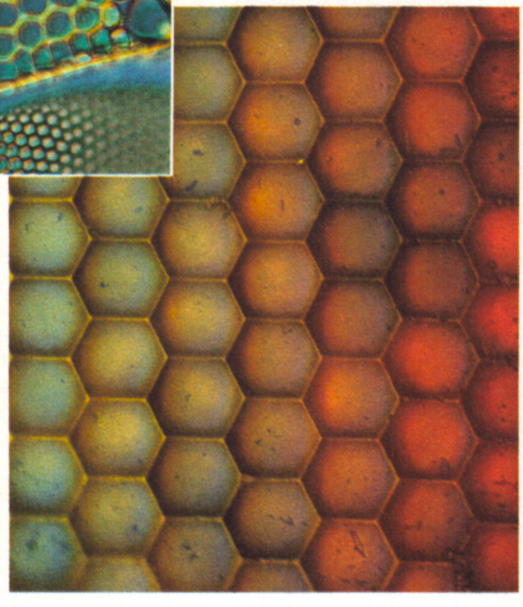






Catastrophe theory may extend our understanding of natural forms. Traditional geometry pointed the way. Hexagonal patterns, for example, occur in numerous structures, such as an alga (above) and a dragon-fly's eye (right). The hexagon is one of only three shapes that, regularly repeated, can cover an area – and hence is a 'preferred' shape to fill a flat region

nature of the world, and the patterns and limitations of events. But, to put them in their proper perspective, elementary catastrophes should be seen as analogous to the basic regular forms of geometry. The ancient Greeks discovered that, of all the two-dimensional regular polygons (straight-sided shapes with sides of equal length), only three could be packed together side by side to fill a flat surface so that there were no gaps between them: the triangle, the square and the hexagon. This mathematical fact has nothing to do with the materials from which the forms are made, or their size. The Greeks

not of much intrinsic interest. The important point, however, is that any system that shows 'catastrophic' behaviour and is controlled by two factors will, as already stated, be described by a similar graph – a sheet with a single fold. This is part of the central proposition of catastrophe theory, the 'classification theorem' put forward by Thom in 1965. The fold may be larger or smaller, the slopes may be steeper or more gradual, but the basic shape will be the same. The qualitative behaviour of any such system does not depend on the nature of the control variables but only on their number. For a system with only two control variables there is only one possible type of behaviour – the cusp.

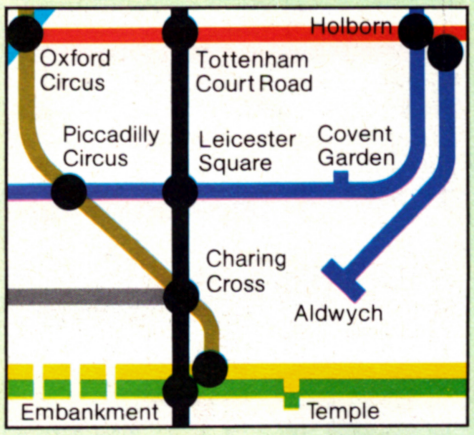
Complex systems – an animal, a crowd of people – may, of course, be controlled by far more than two factors. But when the number of control variables increases beyond two, we are in difficulties – for then the surfaces representing the behaviour of the system are in four or more dimensions, and cannot be represented on paper. One can get some idea of them, however, by making 'projections' of them onto various axes: that is, drawing a surface representing the behaviour for a steady value of one or more of the control variables.

Catastrophe theory may seem to be making an extraordinary statement about the

The branching forms of a lightning stroke (above) and of the fronds of a seaweed (left) show a clear resemblance to each other – and to the patterns made by cracks in a wall, by the veins of a leaf, and by channels in a river delta. Such patterns, qualitatively so similar, yet never identical to each other, are difficult to analyse mathematically. Catastrophe theory holds out the promise of bringing order into the study of natural forms like these

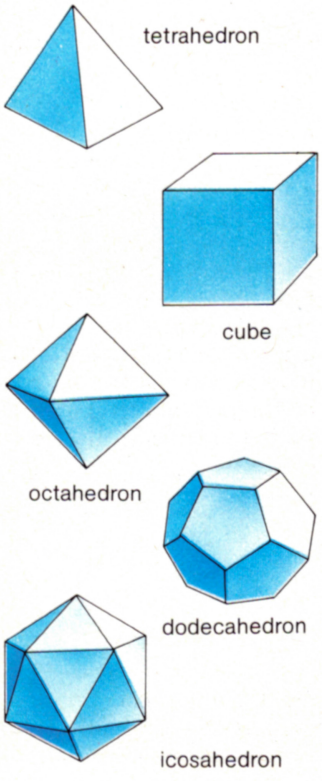
Right: the five 'perfect' solids. Each one has faces that are identical in shape and size

Catastrophe theory is based on topology, which in its simplest form has been called 'rubber-sheet geometry'. Like ordinary geometry it deals with relationships among points, lines and surfaces; but it differs from it in ignoring questions of magnitude – of length, area, angle and so on. For example, the topologist will be interested in whether or not two circles intersect, but not in their sizes. Geometrical figures drawn on a rubber sheet could be squeezed and stretched by any amount without changing any of the relationships that interest the topologist: intersecting circles may change in size and turn into, say, ellipses or irregular figures, but will continue to intersect. So the topologist considers these two maps to be equivalent. One (right) is to scale and shows the true positions of some London underground



Out of all proportion

railways stations and the routes followed by the lines, superimposed on an aerial photograph of the city. The other (left) shows the tracks straightened out and the stations pushed and pulled into a neat pattern. Travellers, like topologists, consider this map good enough for their purposes, for it correctly shows which stations lie on which lines, where there are interchanges, and so on. Catastrophe theory is similarly qualitative: it does not consider the details of measurements, but only the *shape* of the folds in its graphs – for this shape describes the type of catastrophe.



also made the remarkable discovery that there are only five solids whose faces are regular polygons of the same shape: the tetrahedron (4-faced), the cube, the octahedron (8-faced), the dodecahedron (12-faced) or the icosahedron (20-faced). There is no mystery about this: a solid body with regular polygonal faces simply has to be one of these.

Most favoured forms

And so it should be no surprise to find these shapes turning up again and again in nature – not because geometry in some mysterious way dictates to nature, but because there is simply no other way for it to turn out. The cells of a honeycomb are hexagonal for the same reason that the arrangement of a tray of pennies, if it is shaken until the coins are closely packed, is hexagonal: to minimise the wasted space between the objects. Thom believes that the elementary catastrophes of catastrophe theory are strictly analogous – they must recur in nature in the way that many geometrical forms do.

Thom has always stressed that scientific theories based on catastrophe mathematics would be essentially *qualitative* and that they would be of more use in classifying existing data and suggesting new approaches to research than in making *quantitative* predictions in the manner of other scientific theories. But almost from the beginning others were prepared to go further. Chief among them was Christopher Zeeman: by applying catastrophe theory to numerous specific biological, social and psychological processes he hoped to attract the interest of researchers already working in the relevant fields. In so doing, he was pushing the theory into a predictive role similar to that of the theories of Newtonian science. Opinion among experts is divided on the question of just how far this is legitimate.

Suddenly, in 1975 and 1976, catastrophe theory came into the limelight. A BBC-TV *Horizon* programme was made about the subject. *New Scientist* carried an article and illustrated its cover with the words CATASTROPHE THEORY in huge, cracking stone letters, like an advertisement for an epic disaster movie. *Newsweek* gave the theory two pages. Suddenly everyone was interested: catastrophe theory was news.

Attempts to apply catastrophe theory are explored on page 2466

Bizarre dreams of a gallows that would not work haunted both the convicted man and his executioner in the Victorian Babbacombe murder case. FRANK SMYTH relates the strange story of the man who could not be hanged

James Berry, the hangman who failed to execute John Lee. In the 19th century most hangmen worked as freelances, receiving their commissions from local county sheriffs, who were the officers charged with carrying out the death sentence. Berry worked as an executioner from 1884 to 1892 and during that time executed 134 men and women

Third time lucky

ON THE NIGHT BEFORE he became a public hangman, James Berry began to suffer from bad dreams. This upset him the more because, as he repeatedly asserted, his waking conscience was clear. The stocky, 32-year-old Yorkshireman was the son of a woollen worker who had a profound belief in Methodism and law and order. Berry inherited these beliefs, and so chose the police force as his first career.

During his 10 years as a constable in the West Riding, Berry had become friendly with William Marwood, executioner to the City of London and County of Middlesex, and had learned most of the tricks of the trade from him. When the old man died in September 1883, Berry, having left the police force, applied for the post. He did not get it. Indeed, he did not receive his first hanging commission until March 1884: he was to hang two men at Calton Prison, Edinburgh, for a fee of 20 guineas (£21), a second-class return rail ticket from his home in Bradford, Yorkshire, and his board and lodging. As he lay waiting for the dawn of that first assignment, the dreams began.

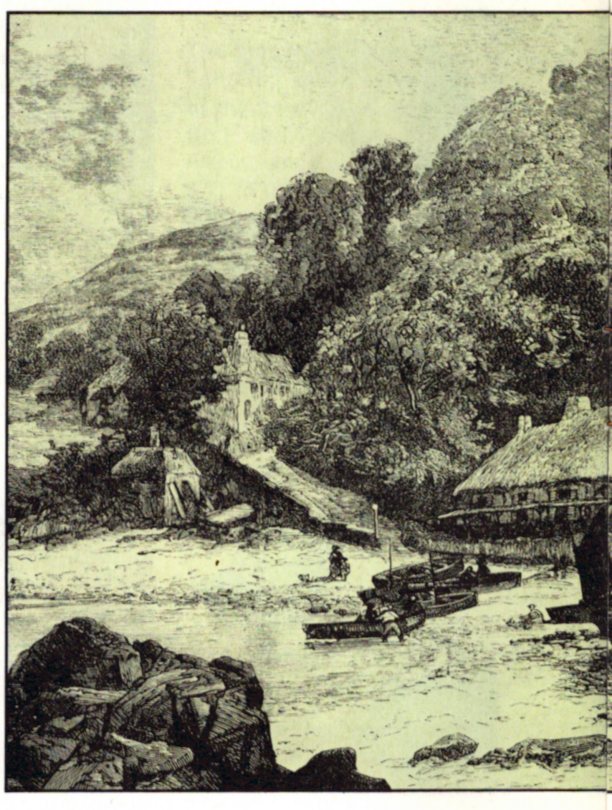
Berry later refused to use the word 'nightmare' to describe his unsettling visions. He called them 'dreams of things that never will be, and which is (*sic*) impossible.'

What distressed him most about these dreams was that they concerned the failure of his equipment. In the worst one, he stood on the gallows desperately working the lever that released the trapdoor for the fatal drop – but the trap stayed shut.

By the strangest of coincidences, the dream that so shook Berry gave sublime confidence to a man named John Lee, who was to dream it too.

In the late autumn of 1884, Berry came across the name John Lee in the columns of his local newspaper. Lee had been accused of killing Miss Emma Ann Whitehead Keyse, a former maid of honour as well as a friend to Queen Victoria. She was found battered to death, her oil-soaked clothing on fire, in her dining room on the night of 15 November 1884. Among her servants at The Glen, the house where she lived in Babbacombe in Devon, were 19-year-old John Lee, her footman, and his half-sister, Elizabeth Harris, the cook. It was Elizabeth Harris who gave the alarm and was the principal witness at the Exeter Assizes the next month.

Lee, the court was told, was a convicted petty thief who had been hired by the kindly rich woman at a wage of four shillings a week. Lee had come under suspicion of theft again and, though Emma Keyse had given him another chance, she had docked his wages by half. On the night of the murder, Elizabeth



The scene of the murder at Babbacombe, Devon, shown in a contemporary engraving (right) and in a modern photograph (far right). Miss Keyse, the murdered mistress of the villa known as The Glen, was an austere, wealthy and God-fearing woman who regarded her servants as children for whom she was responsible

SPECIAL EDITION.

THE DAILY WESTERN TIMES" OFFICE,
Monday, 9 30 a.m.

THE
BABBACOMBE MURDER.

POSTPONEMENT OF THE EXECUTION.

TERRIBLE SCENES ON THE SCAFFOLD.

PAINFUL SI

THE BABBACOMBE MURDER.

The final scene in the notorious Babbacombe Tragedy was to have been enacted this morning, when, at eight o'clock, John Lee, the convicted murderer of Miss Keyse, was led out to the scaffold to pay the penalty of his crime upon the scaffold. A terrible scene, however, ensued. The scaffold drop refused to act, and after three unsuccessful attempts to carry out the dread sentence of the law, the Sheriff postponed the execution.
The circumstances under which the murder of Miss Keyse took place will be so well remembered that only a brief reference to the details of the murdered lady had

RESPITE OF THE PRISONER—SENTENCE TO BE COMMUTED.

Mr. H. Stokes, Clerk to Mr. James, (Under Sheriff) has received the following from that gentleman :—
"Sentence is respited, and will be commuted."

TOPICS OF THE D

[From the "Times."]

THE MINISTERIAL C
The debate on Sir Stafford North censure will begin to-day, and the fa ment will once more become dependen

ABORTIVE ATTEMPTS TO EXECUTE THE CONVICT.

PAINFUL SCENES.

THE EXECUTION POSTPONED.

Eight o'clock this morning was the hour fixed for the execution of Lee. The morning broke somewhat gloomily, for there had been considerable rain during the night. At half-past seven only one or two lo terers were to be observed in the neighbourhood of the

Left: headlines from the local press carrying news of the abortive execution – and granting of respite – on 23 February 1885. Later the same week the *Devon Evening Express* published a letter written by Lee to his family before his 'execution' in which he said, 'They have not told six words truth, that is, the servants and that lovely step-sister who carries her character with her'

faint at the horrible sight. When he faced the village constable he said tearfully: 'I have lost my best friend.'

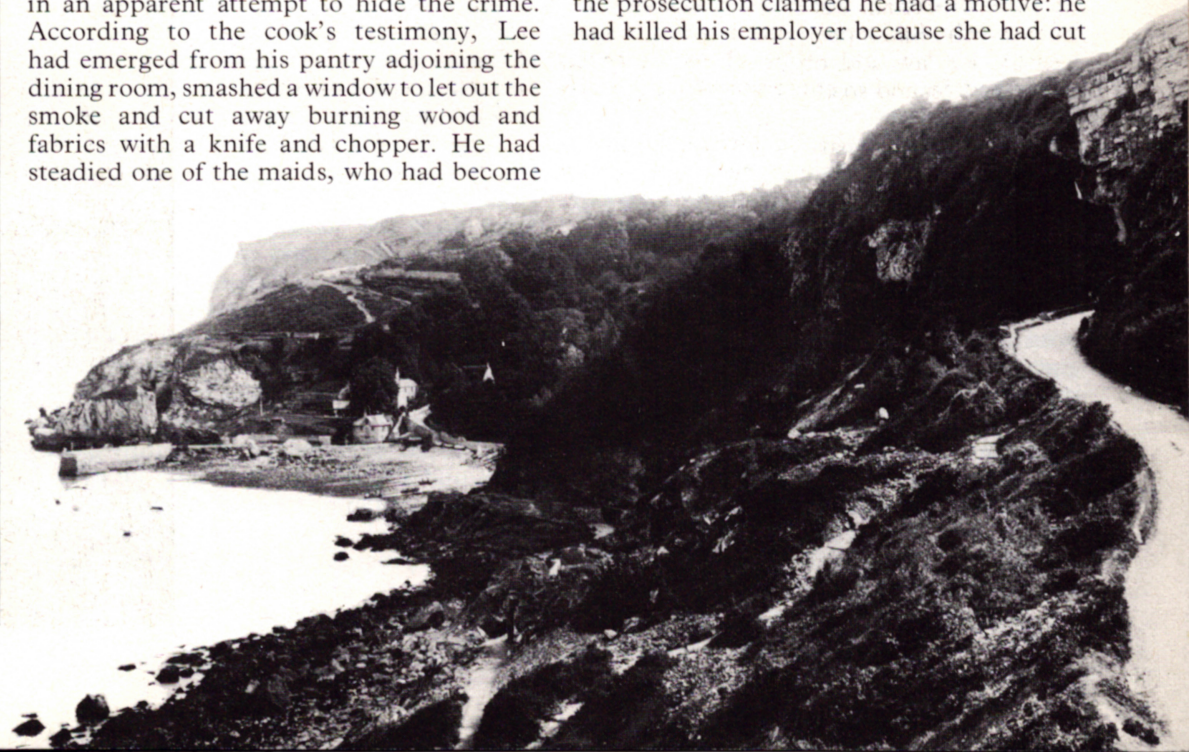
During the police investigation, a great deal of circumstantial evidence built up against Lee. His clothing was bloodstained and hairs like those of his employer were found on it; the knife and chopper he had used were bloodstained too. The maid he had caught in a faint found bloodstains on her nightdress where he had touched her. And a can of lamp oil, which his half-sister said should have been full, was found empty in his pantry. The very proximity of the pantry to the murder scene told against him.

On the other hand, Lee had made no attempt to escape, though he probably had ample time before the alarm was raised. He had helped to carry his mistress's body, which might well account for the bloodstains and hairs found on his own clothing. Some of the stains could easily have been Lee's own, since he had gashed his hand while smashing the window to let out smoke; those on the maid's nightdress and on the knife and chopper were almost certainly his. And, although the chopper may have been used in the murder, equally it may not have been.

Lee repeatedly swore his innocence, but the prosecution claimed he had a motive: he had killed his employer because she had cut

Harris said, she had awoken in her smoke-filled room, made her way to the dining room and found the body.

Her mistress's head had been battered in and her body doused in lamp oil and ignited in an apparent attempt to hide the crime. According to the cook's testimony, Lee had emerged from his pantry adjoining the dining room, smashed a window to let out the smoke and cut away burning wood and fabrics with a knife and chopper. He had steadied one of the maids, who had become



his paltry wages in half. In vain the defence pointed out that two shillings were better than none, and that Lee and the whole household were thrown out of work by Emma Keyse's death. Nevertheless the jury found Lee guilty. Asked if he had anything to say before sentence was passed, Lee drew himself upright in the dock and said calmly: 'I am innocent. The Lord will never permit me to be executed.'

Later there were murmurings that Lee's half-sister, whose evidence against him was so important, had been seeing a lover. In the prim Emma Keyse's household, this would have been a far worse offence than petty theft, and instant dismissal would probably have been Elizabeth Harris's lot. Perhaps, the rumours went, she had been discovered with her lover by her employer, and he had struck out in panic – leaving Elizabeth Harris to eradicate the crime by lighting the fire. Whatever the truth, such conjecture came too late to help Lee.

James Berry was nearing the end of his first full year as an executioner and, with about a dozen successful hangings to his credit, he felt that he might be called upon in the Lee case. And in the first week of February he received an official commission from Henry M. James, under sheriff of Devonshire, to hang John Lee at Exeter jail for the murder of Emma Ann Whitehead Keyse. The sentence was to be carried out at 8 a.m. on Monday 23 February 1885. Berry arrived at Exeter two days before.

Machinery of death

On the night before the execution, Berry pointed out what he considered to be shortcomings in the scaffold's machinery of death. He told the prison governor that the leaves of the oak trapdoor were too light; that spring clips should be set in the walls of the pit beneath to catch the doors as they fell open; that the iron strips edging the doors were too thin and that the bolts holding the trap shut were badly adjusted. The governor explained that the scaffold had been moved and re-erected by a gang of convicts, but had been used without any problems a few months before. Using a sandbag weighing the same as Lee, Berry tested the lever several times, and each time the trapdoor dropped perfectly.

Later that night, Lee had a final interview with the prison governor and the chaplain. The governor told him that there was no possibility of a reprieve. Lee merely shrugged, reasserted his innocence and added mysteriously: 'Elizabeth Harris could say the word which could clear me, if she would.' Both men noted Lee's coolness.

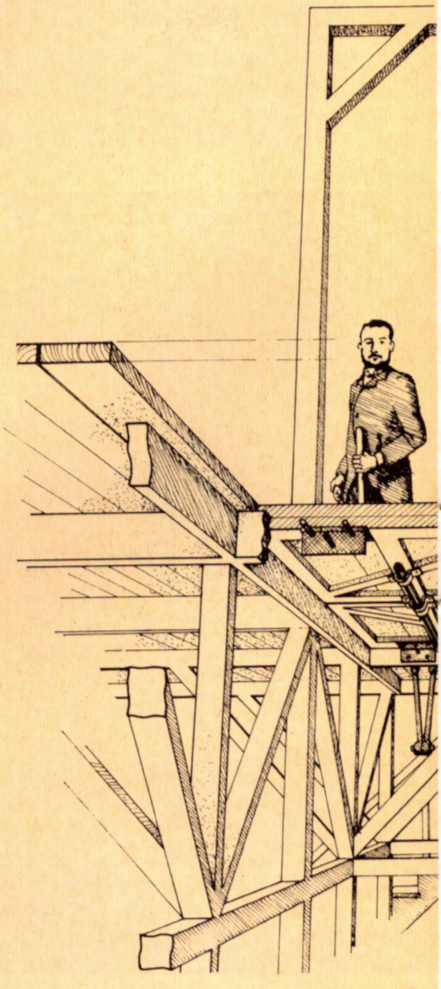
On the morning of the execution, Berry was disturbed to learn about Lee's dream of the night before: his own uneasy vision from another angle. For Lee had dreamed that he was standing on the gallows with the noose around his neck – and the trapdoor did not fall when the hangman pulled the lever. Lee had laughed when he told his dream, saying: 'You see, I shan't be hanged today. You will never hang me. You wait and see.'

When Berry entered the condemned cell at 7.56 a.m., Lee rose from his bunk to meet him, rather pale but calm – as Berry put it later, 'the coolest customer I ever handled'. Berry, Lee, the governor and four warders set out across the prison yard, preceded by the chaplain reading the service. At the door of the shed housing the scaffold, they were met by the under sheriff and the prison surgeon. Ten newspaper reporters watched from positions by the shed windows. According to some of their reports, as Lee entered the shed a white dove alighted on the roof and then flew over the prison walls.

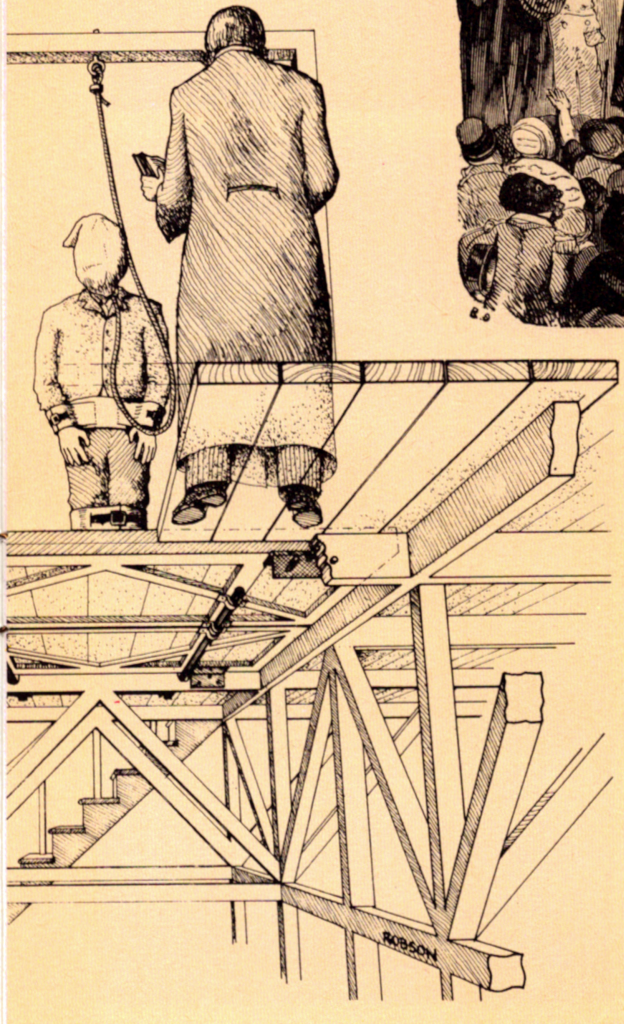
The grim party ascended the steps of the gallows. Berry led Lee to the centre of the trap, strapped his legs together below the knee, fixed the noose around his neck and placed the white hood over his head. The chaplain faced him. The hangman then stepped back, kicked out the restraining pin and pulled the lever. The rattle of the bolts being drawn was heard – but the trap failed to fall.

It was the moment that both Berry and Lee had lived before in their dreams. For a few seconds Berry gaped at the fully drawn lever under his hand, and then he moved forward and stamped on the trapdoors. They remained firmly closed. Two warders joined him, thumping on the traps with their heavy boots.

Six minutes elapsed before Berry –



Below: a modern artist's impression of the scaffold in Exeter jail (left), where John Lee's execution was to take place. The gallows was contained in an old coach shed in the prison yard. A heavy beam had been let into the brickwork at either end of the shed and an iron eye bolt set into the centre of the beam to take the rope. Directly under this a platform had been built with a double-leaved trapdoor in its centre. The trap was held shut by two iron bolts running underneath it; these were withdrawn when a lever on the platform (normally held in the safe position by a metal pin) was drawn back. The key words used by the hangman were 'straps, noose, hood, pin, lever, drop' and if all went smoothly the whole thing could be over in 12 seconds from the moment the condemned man stepped onto the trap



'clearly shaken', as the reports said – took off the hood and noose from Lee, who was 'ashen, but not whiter than some of the witnesses'. He was led off while Berry tested the trap with the sandbag again: it worked perfectly.

Lee was brought back, and this time Berry yanked the lever back with such force that it bent under his weight. But the doors remained firm under Lee's feet. For the next 20 minutes, Berry, the carpenter and the prison engineer worked on the scaffold and tested it repeatedly. They greased the bolts, planed the doors, and were finally satisfied.

Back came Lee and the chaplain. As the latter recalled: 'The lever was pulled again and again. A great noise was heard, which sounded like the falling of the drop. But to my horror, when I turned my eyes to the scaffold, I saw the poor convict standing upon the drop as I had seen him twice before. I refused to stay any longer.' In fact the chaplain buckled at the knees and was caught by a warder, then led off the gallows with Lee. Everyone was in a tremulous state and some of the warders were in tears. But John Lee kept his composure.

Above: a contemporary engraving of a public execution, a macabre relic of medieval England that persisted until 1868. After that time executions were carried out within the prison, with only official witnesses present

A messenger was sent to London to report to the Home Secretary. Meanwhile, Lee was asked if there was anything he would like and he said that he could eat another 'last' breakfast. He ate the huge repast ordered for Berry, who had lost his appetite completely.

That evening a telegram arrived from the Home Secretary granting Lee a respite, and his sentence was subsequently commuted to life imprisonment. Berry too began a life sentence of a kind: not only did his dream of the jammed trapdoor recur more frequently, but he had to face constant questions about the Lee affair from everyone.

A lucky escape?

The most plausible explanation for the jammed trapdoor was not put forward until 40 years later, when most of the principals were dead. This theory was that a fault in the construction of the platform had caused the problem: a plank of wood, set edge on to the trapdoors, had been warped and therefore arched upwards in the middle. When the chaplain stood on it opposite Lee to read the prayers, the plank straightened out and jammed under the hinged side of the trap. When the sandbag was used for testing, the chaplain was absent and the trap worked.

But how could the plank withstand the violent stamping of three men? And if it were the true explanation, Lee's escape would be even more remarkable: for if he had not been moved at exactly the same time as the chaplain, the chances are that the trap mechanism would have worked.

Lee served 20 years in prison. Shortly after he came out in 1905 he married a woman who had apparently waited for him, and the couple went to the United States. There he died in 1933. He declared his innocence to the end of his life, and insisted that divine intervention had saved him.

As for Berry, the fiasco at Exeter had one personal satisfaction: he was invited to collaborate with Lieutenant-Colonel Alten Beamish, Royal Engineers, who was attached to the surveyor's department of the Home Office, in designing a 'standard' gallows. Their design was fitted in British prisons until the abolition of the death penalty for murder in the late 1960s.

Long before his own death in 1913, however, Berry had turned strongly against capital punishment. But though he had turned to religion with renewed fervour, he spurned the theory of divine intervention for Lee's miraculous escape from the gallows. For, he would ask, why should God intervene for Lee and not for the many other almost certainly innocent victims among the 134 men and women he had hanged in eight years as a public executioner?

A married Christ?

In 1982 a British best-seller argued the remarkable case that Christ was married to Mary Magdalene – and that their lineal descendants live in contemporary France. BRIAN INNES examines the evidence for this hypothesis – and assesses its implications

Did Christ marry? The gospel story of the first miracle, of the turning of water into wine at the wedding feast at Cana, pictured here in a painting by Juan de Flandes (flourished 1496-*c.* 1519), seems to suggest that the wedding in question was Christ's own

IN THE FIRST WEEKS OF 1982 a book was published in Great Britain that went very quickly to the top of the best-seller lists. Written by television script-writer Henry Lincoln, with the assistance of Richard Leigh and Michael Baigent, it was entitled *The holy blood and the Holy Grail*; and its subject matter – on the face of it a most unlikely one to interest a British readership – derived from the mysteries surrounding the tiny southern French village of Rennes-le-Château (see page 161).

None of the content of *The holy blood and the Holy Grail* was of itself new: much had already appeared in French publications devoted to the subject of Rennes, and the remainder had been gathered together from a variety of published sources – some of them respectable, some of them suspect. But it must be said for Lincoln, Leigh and Baigent that they have gone back to many original sources of information, that they have researched the background to the affair with some care, and that they have taken the trouble to interview a number of the people whose names and views are quoted with such freedom by other writers on Rennes.

The conclusions that the authors reach are presented, properly, in the order in which they occurred in their research: beginning in 1969, when Lincoln first read a book by Gérard de Sède entitled *Le trésor maudit de Rennes* ('The accursed treasure of Rennes'), and ending with a startling proposition that seems to have little or no direct connection with the obscure hamlet in the uplands of the Languedoc. But it is simpler to summarise them in reverse order.

Lincoln, Leigh and Baigent propose that Christ did not die on the cross: that either the crucifixion was a sham, Christ's living body being taken down and spirited away, or that some substitute was found to endure the agony of death. The survival of Christ is not, however, necessary to the next part of the argument: that he had previously been married to the woman we know as Mary Magdalene, that she had had children by him, and that after the crucifixion she had fled with them, eventually reaching France.

The holy blood and the Holy Grail identifies the descendants of Christ and Mary Magdalene with the Holy Grail: its argument derives from the fact that the Grail appears in many early writings as 'Sangraal' or 'Sangreal', which it proposes should properly be read as *Sang Réal*, or 'royal blood'. This royal bloodline, say the authors, became in time the family of Merovingian kings, who ruled southern France before they were deposed by Pepin III, the son of Charles Martel, from whom the subsequent French monarchy was derived. The Merovingian line appears to have died out in 751 with Childeric III, but Lincoln, Leigh and Baigent claim that direct descendants can be traced, and that the Merovingian line is currently represented by a man calling himself Pierre Plantard de St-Clair.

Pierre Plantard de St-Clair claims to be the present Grand Master of an ancient order, similar to and connected with the Knights Templar, called the Prieuré de Sion. It is said that one of the principal activities of the Prieuré de Sion throughout the centuries has been to protect the succession of the Merovingians, in the hope that the present time will see the re-emergence of the ancient line. This is to be followed, according to the plan, by the establishment throughout Europe of some kind of hierarchy that will impose a new order of government, founded on the descendants of Christ, eventually to

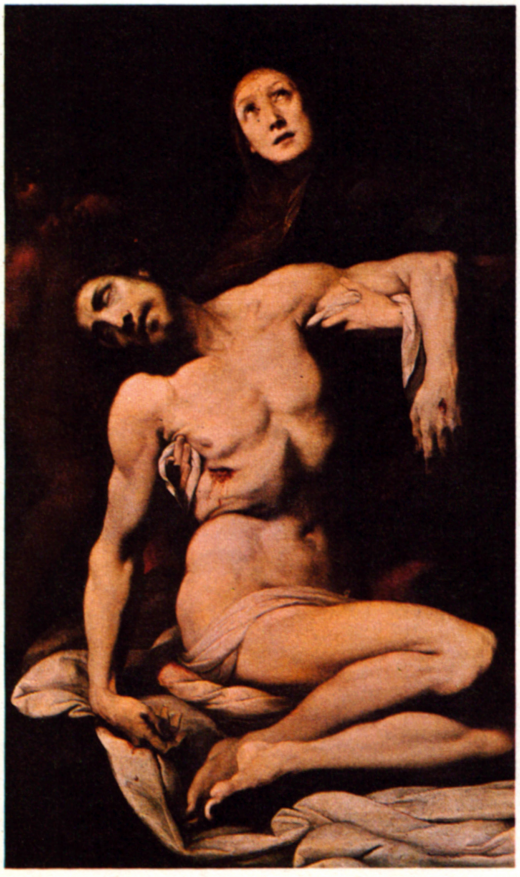
bring lasting peace and goodwill to all men.

And where does Rennes-le-Château come into all this? Here the argument becomes rather fragmentary, but it is suggested that in 1891 the village priest, Bérenger Saunière, discovered documents that established the present Merovingian genealogy – that, in fact, the 'treasure' of Rennes was not gold, not the long-lost regalia of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem, but the proof of Pierre Plantard de St-Clair's heredity.

This brief summary is perhaps a little unfair to *The holy blood and the Holy Grail*: the book is more than 400 pages long, and the list of authorities consulted is impressive. Nevertheless, these are the conclusions, and it is worth looking in greater detail at the salient parts of the argument.

The authors quote an observation from Dr Geza Vermes of Oxford University: 'There is complete silence in the Gospels concerning the marital status of Jesus. . . . Such a state of affairs is sufficiently unusual in ancient Jewry to prompt further enquiry.' Some justification for a belief that Christ was married can indeed be found in the fact that he is frequently referred to in the Gospels as a Rabbi – a trained teacher – and that the Jewish Mishnaic Law expressly states that 'an unmarried man may not be a teacher.' If Jesus was a rabbi in the strict sense of the word, he was almost certainly married.

Many of the disciples, such as Peter, are known to have been married, and at no point in his teaching did Christ advocate celibacy.



Top: the sleepy village of Rennes-le-Château in southern France. Investigation of the mysterious riches of a 19th-century Rennes priest led authors Henry Lincoln, Richard Leigh and Michael Baigent to uncover a complex series of clues that, as they revealed in their best-seller *The holy blood and the Holy Grail* (1982), suggested that descendants of Jesus Christ might be living in France today

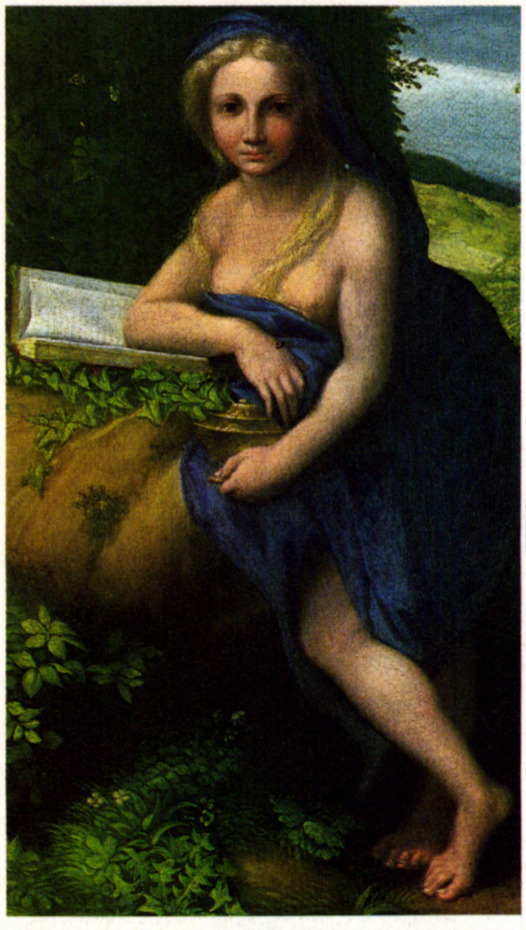
Left: the Virgin Mary tends her son's body after the crucifixion. But did Christ really die on the cross? The Greek version of the biblical story of Joseph of Arimathea (above, preaching to the English, in a water colour by William Blake) requesting the custody of Christ's corpse has him asking Pontius Pilate for the *soma* – a word used to denote a living body

Indeed, in Matthew 19:4–5, he expressly declares:

> Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female. . . . For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?

And there is a curious incident in the Gospels that seems to describe the wedding of Christ. The story of the wedding at Cana is a familiar one to all Christians. Neither the groom nor the bride is named; all we know is that Christ was 'called' to the wedding, and that his mother was also there: 'And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine. . . . His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.' And so Christ performed his first miracle, the transmutation of water into wine.

Immediately after, 'the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse; but thou hast kept the good wine until now.' It seems inescapable that 'the bridegroom' is none other than the man who has just produced more wine – that is, Christ himself – and there seems no other explanation for the fact



Left: *The Magdalene*, by Antonio Correggio (1489/94–1534). The authors of *The holy blood and the Holy Grail* suggest that Christ was married to Mary Magdalene – and that, after the crucifixion, she fled with her children to France, where her direct descendants continue to live. The descendants of Christ, they argue, include the Merovingian dynasty – the most famous of whom was Clovis, King of the Franks (below right), who ruled from 481 to 511 and under whom the Franks were converted to Christianity

that Christ and his mother appear to be the two people in charge of the celebration.

The identification of Mary Magdalene as the wife is based upon less sure grounds. She is identified as 'the woman who anointed Jesus', the sister of Martha and Lazarus, Mary of Bethany. And Lazarus is identified as the 'beloved disciple' who, at the Last Supper, was 'leaning on Jesus's bosom'.

The Holy Grail

The argument that Christ did not die on the cross is not a new one; it has been proposed by numerous writers, notably by H. J. Schonfield in *The Passover plot*. *The holy blood and the Holy Grail* devotes some pages to it, but to follow its reasoning it is necessary only to assume that Christ and the Magdalene had one or more children, and that there is some basic truth in the old legend that Mary Magdalene brought the Holy Grail to France.

Most scholars are agreed that the legend of the Holy Grail (see page 1314) embodies a wealth of pagan symbolism that can be traced back to well before the birth of Christ. During the 13th century, however, it began to take on a peculiarly Christian significance. *The holy blood and the Holy Grail* points out that the elaboration of the Grail legend took place contemporaneously with the Crusades.

The first specific Grail romance is judged to be that by Chrétien de Troyes, entitled

End of the line...

The researches of Henry Lincoln, Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh suggest that the Merovingian kings, who ruled southern France until the royal line apparently died out with Childeric III (right) in 751, were the direct descendants of Christ. And, they say, the present successor to the line is alive and well and living in France.

The brother of the Merovingian king Clovis II (633–656), Sigisbert III, who became king of Austrasia in 632, was succeeded by Dagobert II. On the death of his father in 656, Dagobert was kidnapped and exiled to Ireland where, despite the undertakings of his ancestor Clovis I, he was brought up in the Celtic Church. But in 664, at the Council of Whitby, St Wilfrid of York reconciled the Celtic and Roman Churches. Two years later Dagobert married an Irish princess, Mathilde – but the marriage produced no male heir, and in 670 Mathilde died in childbirth.

Dagobert returned to France, and in 674 was proclaimed king of Austrasia. Expert genealogists insist that he had no male heir by any subsequent marriage, and that, on his assassination in 679 near the town of Stenay in north-east France, the Merovingian line was finally extinguished. According to *The holy blood and the Holy Grail*, however, Dagobert married again – to Gisèlle, daughter of the Count of Razès and a niece of the king of the Visigoths. It is through Dagobert's son, Sigisbert IV, that the present representative of the Merovingian line, Pierre Plantard de St-Clair, is claimed to be descended.

Le conte du Graal or *Le roman de Perceval*, and written toward the end of the 12th century. In this story the Grail appears to Perceval in the castle of the Fisher King: we are told little about it, except that it is made of gold and studded with gems, and there is no mention of any connection with Christ. The Christian element was added by Robert de Boron, in his *Roman de l'estoire dou Saint Graal*, which was written some years after Chrétien's, but which Robert claims to be based upon a more ancient source. He explicitly states that the Grail was the cup of the Last Supper, filled with Christ's blood.

At about the same time as Robert de Boron's romance, another Grail story also appeared. It is anonymous, and is known generally as the *Perlesvaus*. It is in the *Perlesvaus* that the Grail becomes a truly mystic concept, apparently connected in some way with 'the secrets of the Saviour', and known to a group of 33 men and their two 'masters', who are 'clad in white garments, and not one of them but had a red cross in the midst of his breast'. The date of these romances, and this description, lead Lincoln, Leigh and Baigent to suggest that there is a direct connection between the Knights Templar – who also wore white tunics marked with a red cross – and the guardianship of the Grail.

This connection appears to be confirmed in the opening of Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*. Wolfram attributes the story to 'Kyot, the well-known master', who is readily identified as Guiot de Provins, a troubadour and Templar who visited Germany in 1184 – and almost certainly met Wolfram there. What is strange is that Wolfram apparently describes the Grail as a stone of some kind. It is guarded by knights in the castle of Munsalvaesche; is this Montsalvat, the legendary castle of the Cathars, which can perhaps be identified with Montségur, where the Cathars made their last stand in 1244 (see page 162)?

Above: an illustration from a 15th-century Flemish book of hours showing Christ praying in the garden of Gethsemane on the night of the Last Supper. The Holy Grail – or Sangreal – appears on a hill before him. The authors of *The holy blood and the Holy Grail* suggest that the Grail represents the *Sang Réal* – the holy bloodline of Christ

Parzival is full of suggestive hints, but one point is particularly interesting. *Parzival* is the nephew of Anfortas, the Fisher King; Anfortas traces his ancestry back to one Laziliez, who may possibly be Lazarus; and Laziliez's parents are Terdelaschoye ('Terre de la choix' – chosen land) and Mazadan (from Masada? – or the Magdalene?). Parzival's son was Lohengrin, and Lohengrin's son or grandson – the tale is a little vague – was Godfroi de Bouillon, the leader of the First Crusade, who captured Jerusalem in 1099.

The Merovingians

Between the fifth and the eighth centuries the Merovingian dynasty ruled large parts of France and Germany. They derived their descent from Mérovée, who is known to have been king in 417, and from that date they can be traced to Childeric III, who was deposed in 751. The most famous of the Merovingian kings was Clovis, the grandson of Mérovée, who ruled from 481 to 511; it was under Clovis that the Franks were converted to Christianity.

Most importantly, it was to Roman Catholicism that Clovis was converted, under the influence of his wife Clothilde. At that time, the Roman Church had less influence in western Europe than the Celtic Church, centred in Ireland, or even heretical Churches such as the Arian. The association with Clovis gave the Roman Church the power that it was to hold throughout Europe for the next thousand years.

The Visigoths, whose empire extended throughout Spain, over the Pyrenees and as far north as Toulouse, were adherents of Arianism. Perhaps Clovis's most important campaign was against the Visigoths, whom he drove steadily southward and finally defeated in the Razès at Rhedae – today the village of Rennes-le-Château.

The Merovingians were commonly known as 'the long-haired ones': like Sampson, they apparently believed that their power resided in their hair. It is certainly true that when Childeric III was deposed his hair was ritually shorn at the command of the pope. The Merovingians were also said to bear a peculiar birthmark that attested to their sacred origin: a blood-red cross – like that emblazoned on the white tunics of the Knights Templar.

Genealogists have been unable to discover any evidence for the continuation of the Merovingian line after the eighth century. For further information we have to turn to a very different source: a slender file in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, known as *Les dossiers secrets de Henri Lobineau* – the secret dossiers of Henri Lobineau.

Mysterious documents, murders and suppression of information – see page 2494

Only make-believe?

Which comes first – the facts or the fiction? Does art, as most people believe, imitate life? Or can the 'impossible' happen and the reverse occur? BOB RICKARD describes several disturbing cases that seem to prove that it can – and frequently does

THAT ART TAKES REALITY as its starting point is familiar enough an idea. Novelists generally describe situations that find an echo in their readers' experience, many artists are inspired by nature and others paint directly from it – some famous artists have, indeed, painted from photographs. But the idea that nature follows art – that real life somehow replicates the visual arts and literature – is altogether stranger. And yet there is some evidence to suggest that this does, indeed, happen – that, perhaps, the power of the creative mind is strong enough not only to inspire the imaginations of other people but to alter the very structure of reality.

Perhaps the most famous example of fact following fiction was the tragic sinking of the liner *Titanic* in 1912, which was alike in most details to a novel written 14 years earlier about the sinking of the *Titan* (see page 111). Nor do the coincidences end there. One of the *Titanic* passengers who died was the journalist, W. T. Stead. His writings and lectures frequently used the image of a shipwreck as a simile for death, and the panic of a drowning person for the disorientation he believed was the state of the discarnate spirit in the period following death.

And the series of coincidences goes on with the near miss of a coal boat named *Titanian* in 1935. This vessel nearly went down after hitting an iceberg close to the position of the *Titanic* accident (see page 640). Finally, there is a more recent postscript, which happened to the Melkis family of Dunstable, Bedfordshire, in July 1975. They were watching a film about the *Titanic* tragedy on television when, just as the ship was about to strike the iceberg, their roof caved in. The cause was a chunk of ice of unknown origin from the sky.

How can we account for real-life events apparently replicating fictional ones? Are they mere accidents of chance – or are they inherently meaningful? Are they only precognitive – or are they something more? The real mystery is how the immensely complicated chains of cause and effect of everyday life can result in a significant conjunction of people, places, names, values, and so on, in such a way as to make it meaningful to observers. Is it possible that the alleged sources of inspiration for fiction – such as angels, spirits and other discarnate entities, as well as dreams – hold the answer? Perhaps. But before we can find it, we need to examine the phenomena themselves. Consider these examples.

In December 1975 France's most wanted man, Jean-Charles Willoquet, was arrested by members of the anti-gang squad – while he was watching a television drama based on the anti-gang squad. The Canadian postcode for a farmer named McDonald contained the sequence EIEIO. During a television showing of the film *Around the world in eighty days* in April 1975, the Dumfriesshire village of Ruthwell was blacked out just as the heroes were about to set off in their hot-air balloon – because a two-man balloon, similar to the fictional one, crashed into the power lines. In this light the Universe does not seem to be like Sir Isaac Newton's 'great machine', nor the 'great thought' of Sir Arthur Eddington, but more like a great dream of a universal sentient being. The synchronistic phenomena of our existence seem to have more in common with dream events than with anything else. And, like dreams, many of these events have a dark side, dealing in death, disaster and destruction, as the following examples of intrusive fate show.

In 1975 a book by David Boulton, *The making of Tania Hearst*, suggested that the kidnapping of the publishing heiress Patricia

Left: police surround the burning wreckage of a house in Los Angeles in 1974, in which five members of the Simbionese Liberation Army (SLA) were killed. The SLA had kidnapped – and won over – publishing heiress Patricia Hearst (right, posing against the SLA flag). For a time the FBI believed that James Rusk, the author of the pornographic novel *Black abductor* (1972), had not only inspired the Hearst kidnapping, but also probably organised it – so closely did the characters and events in his book resemble the case. The 'heroine' was even called Patricia. But Rusk proved to be innocent of such a conspiracy. Was this another example of Charles Fort's allusion when he said 'We are being played with'?

Hearst in 1974 was inspired by a pornographic novel, *Black abductor*, published in 1972. In the book, an heiress called Patricia is snatched from a campus as her boyfriend is beaten up; messages are sent to her parents via personal columns in newspapers; she is seduced by the young black leader of the small revolutionary group she eventually joins. FBI investigators interrogated James Rusk, who wrote *Black abductor* under a pseudonym, because they were convinced that Patty Hearst's kidnappers, the Simbionese Liberation Army (SLA), had copied the plot – or worse, that Rusk had planned it with them. Rusk was as astonished as they at the high degree of coincidence. And even if the SLA had been copying his plot, they had no guarantee the heiress would be won over, as she was in real life.

On 8 December 1971 opera star Marie Collier fell to her death from the balcony of her London home. She had been talking to her financial adviser about a new tour of the United States when she opened a window and fell out. Marie Collier had come to fame in the role of Tosca, who leaps to her death

Left: a scene from the film *Around the world in eighty days* (1956). During a television showing in 1975 the Dumfriesshire village of Ruthwell suffered a power cut when a two-man hot-air balloon crashed into the local power lines – just as, on screen, the heroes set off in their balloon. Would the accident have occurred if the film had not been shown at the time the real-life balloon sailed over the village?

Left: in 1971 opera star Marie Collier was apparently happily discussing future plans with a manager when she opened her window and fell to her death. Her last role was that of Tosca, who falls from a wall and is killed

from a wall in the last act. It was Collier's last role before she fell from the window.

One of Julie Christie's most memorable films is *Don't look now* (1973), a dramatisation of a novel by Daphne Du Maurier, in which a couple are haunted by the spirit of their young child who had drowned in a pond outside their country home. The fictional plot came horribly true in March 1979 for Jonathan and Lesley Heale, who were living at Julie Christie's farmhouse in Wales. The film star was just leaving after a visit there when Lesley Heale found her 22-month-old son floating in the large duckpond near the house. She waded in and recovered him, just as the father in the film had done. And the boy had drowned in just 2 feet (60 centimetres) of water. This gruesome coincidence was said to have shattered all concerned.

Victim – or creator?

A somewhat similar story is told by Alan Vaughan in his book *Incredible coincidence* (1979), which makes it seem as if the authors of these fictions that become fact might be more responsible for the events than we can imagine at present. Certainly such people as authors, actors and film makers seem to be involved more than any other group. Vaughan writes:

> My introduction to synchronicity came from Professor Hans Bender, of the Freiberg University Institute for the Border Areas of Psychology, in Germany, in 1968, when I was studying there on a grant from the Parapsychology Foundation. Bender was researching the dreams of an actress and found that about 10 per cent of them had a synchronistic correspondence to her *later* acting roles. For instance, she dreamed of being on a ship with a baby. The baby fell from her arms into the water, and she dived in after it. Two years later she played a role in a television film in which she enacted the improbable scene of her dream.

The 'fact follows fiction' effect also applies to fairytales and fables. Consider this as a version of Snow White: according to the *Sunday Express* (19 August 1979) a gang of seven dwarfs was arrested in Barcelona, Spain, for a series of shotgun raids on jewellery stores. It turned out that they were masterminded by a tall, good-looking blonde whose first name was Nieves, which means snow in Spanish. Another story, printed in the *Daily Express* (3 September 1975) recalls Cinderella, with a twist. At Palma in Majorca, 20-year-old Maria Bispal was arrested for 14 robberies. Her spree came to an end when she lost a shoe while fleeing from the scene of her latest crime. Enter the handsome detective. The shoe fits, and Maria confesses all to him – and off they all go to court (judicial, not royal).

A related question is how myths arise.

Above: the Heale family took over the Welsh home of actress Julie Christie – and found themselves enacting the roles of the parents in the 1973 film *Don't look now*, played by Julie Christie and Donald Sutherland (above right). Just as in the film, their toddler drowned in a pond near the house

Tomorrow's folklore is being created today, partly in the observation of unexplained phenomena. The recurrence of certain types of phenomenon seems to indicate that the collective unconscious contains archetypes that it projects onto the real world. Take this event: just four weeks after the Comoro Islands, situated between Madagascar and the African mainland, obtained independence from France in 1975, Ali Soilih seized power from the elected president with the help of a French mercenary, Colonel Bob Denard. Within a few months Soilih ruled the country with ruthless authority. He was then told by a witch that he could be killed only by a man with a dog. Immediately he ordered all dogs on the island killed. In the third year of his reign of terror, Soilih was overthrown and killed – by a man with a dog. As it happened the same Denard, who brought his pet Alsatian with him, led the

successful fight against the dictator. The motif of a head of state trying to evade a fatal prophecy by eliminating the sources of the threat against him is familiar as a recurring theme in myth: Pelias and Jason, and Laius and Oedipus come to mind immediately.

If archetypes are able to project their organising influence onto the everyday world, then we might expect every thing, place, person, event or item of information such as a name, date or meaning, to form part of an unknown number of these organising patterns. These would be a kind of equivalent of the genetic code, activated by circumstance to give a developing situation its synchronistic character. Such an influence attaching itself to both the place of the *Titanic*'s doom, and to the variations of the ship's name and circumstances, might have drawn the various elements of the *Titanian*'s near miss together by acting upon billions of tiny probabilistic events.

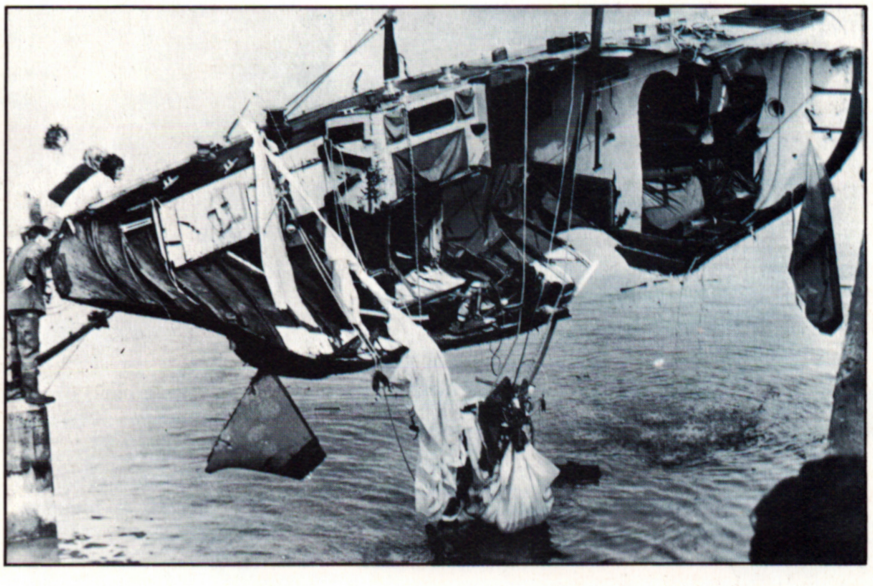
When faced with such events, it is inadequate to try to explain them in terms of life copying art. The idea of art imitating nature is familiar enough – but in fact the influences are bound to be in both directions. Perhaps we underestimate our own abilities to shape the world about us, abilities that are well-known to every village shaman, healer, magician and mystic. And, as we have seen, authors' creative powers are sometimes strong enough to give their work a life of its own.

Here is another example, told to author Arthur Koestler by the writer Pearl Binder. In the autumn of 1966 she was planning a satirical novel – eventually published as *Ladies only* (1972) – with a colleague, George Ordish, and his wife Olive:

> On the spur of the moment I suggested, 'Why shouldn't it be in the future, when the population explosion will have made London almost uninhabitable? There would be camps set up in Hyde Park for the homeless. Let's have a refugee professor camping out there.' 'Viennese,' put in Mr Ordish, 'a broken-down old servant.' 'All goulash and sentiment,' added Mrs Ordish. 'With one of those unpronounceable Hungarian-sounding names . . . Nadoloy . . . Horvath-Nadoly.' And we went on to think of other characters.
>
> A couple of days later we were astounded to read a news item in the morning press reporting that a homeless foreign old man had been found by police wandering alone at night in Hyde Park. He gave his name as Horvath-Nadoly.

All three authors shuddered with a strange thought: this wretched character had, apparently, stepped straight out of their imaginations. Pearl Binder wrote: 'We felt we had invented this tramp, and in the process brought him to life. . . .'

Right: Colonel Bob Denard, the French mercenary who, in 1975, aided the dictator Ali Soilih to take over the Comoro Islands, off the African mainland – and three years later led the rebellion that resulted in Soilih's death. The dictator had been warned by a witch that he would meet his end only at the hands of a man with a dog, and he had duly had all dogs on the islands put to death. But Denard had his Alsatian with him when he led the coup . . . Such synchronicities help create folklore, and are perhaps the agents of our inescapable doom



Above: the wreckage of *Morning Cloud*, yacht of the then British Prime Minister Edward Heath, is hauled ashore in 1974. This was the latest disaster to befall Heath's three yachts that bore that name; it was also the worst, for two crew members lost their lives. And five days before, Mr Heath had posed for publicity photographs at the launch of John Dyson's book *The Prime Minister's boat is missing*

Enfield on trial

The saga of the Enfield poltergeist may have begun with genuinely paranormal phenomena, but was it kept 'alive' by the very presence of its investigators? Several of the case's many critics believe this was so; one of them, ANITA GREGORY, sums up

GUY LYON PLAYFAIR, in his book *This house is haunted* (1980), has written an interesting and lively account about happenings in the Harpers' Enfield council house (see page 2401), giving his impressions of what he and his co-investigator Maurice Grosse felt went on there. It is my opinion that Guy Playfair and Maurice Grosse may perhaps have experienced genuine paranormal happenings, particularly towards the beginning of the case. However, neither anything I saw, or experienced, when I visited the house, nor the content of either Mr Playfair's book or Mr Grosse's defence of it suggests to me that there is evidence here for anything other than a chaotic – and at times distressing – state of affairs.

Top: Janet in a trance. As she was the focus for the alleged poltergeist activity, a certain amount of dissociation might have been expected; but perhaps the attention of the investigators helped create ideal conditions for such a state

Above: Janet being flung out of bed by the 'entity'. Critics have observed, however, that she was an extremely athletic girl and could have jumped from her bed to the floor

To begin with, like all the other researchers, I was excluded from the children's bedroom where the phenomena were supposed to occur. We would all stand or sit on the landing or in adjoining rooms, waiting: then there would be a thump and a squeal, everyone would dash in and see Janet sitting on the floor, the claim being that the 'entity' had thrown her out of bed. By way of evidence we were assured that Janet could not possibly have jumped that far; however, not only were the bedroom walls decorated with certificates testifying to Janet's athletic prowess, but of course there was no need for her to jump at all: a thump on the floor would have sufficed.

Nor was my impression that the girls were play-acting lessened in the least when, as a special favour, I was eventually allowed in the girls' bedroom when phenomena were supposed to be actually happening. I had to stand facing the door, covering my head with the girls' quilted dressing gowns and other garments hanging there – while, amid much giggling, slippers were shied at my head. I made it more than clear that I did not regard the incidents as anything other than a game, and I felt convinced that the girls were rather relieved that I, at least, was treating this as a joke. My lighter approach – I told the girls that all good poltergeists go to bed at 11 p.m., for example – was never held against me by the family, who always welcomed me most cordially, nor by the 'voices' themselves (see page 2426), who allowed me into the sanctuary when 'true believers' were excluded.

I found the 'voices' wholly unconvincing

Left, below and below right: a sequence of photographs taken by a remote controlled camera at intervals of less than a second apparently shows Janet's bedclothes being pulled off her while a curtain blows – in a tight spiral – into the room, although the window was shut. However, sceptic Melvin Harris points out that the curtain is not blowing – it was merely hit by the bedclothes, which could have been easily thrown to one side by Janet. But how was the curtain twisted so quickly?

as anything other than childish play-acting. Almost invariably the children would cover their mouths with blankets or sheets, or simply avert their faces while producing this 'phenomenon'. Maurice Grosse actually believed that the expletives uttered (which, when addressed to me, at least, were punctuated by giggles) were proof of supernatural origin. Where, I was asked, would nicely brought up girls get such words from?

The deep, hoarse voices were originally elicited in response to exceedingly leading questions by Maurice Grosse, who asked the 'entity' to speak to him – and the first voice 'was produced within minutes of being requested.' Moreover, no evidence has been offered that the 'voices' were continuous for two or three hours on end as was frequently claimed. To demonstrate such continuity would require a great deal of scientific work, showing the proportions of 'voices' to 'silence' over prolonged periods, which could then be duly analysed by qualified physiologists.

I must say that I never heard the voices in anything other than quite short snatches. I described what I had heard to a senior hospital consultant who has extensive experience of teaching the various techniques of voice production to patients who, for example, have lost their vocal cords as a result of operations. She laughed at the notion that Janet's gruff voice was anything remotely paranormal, and suggested that a child could quite easily teach herself to talk like that. I am not an expert in this field myself, but I have yet to be convinced that there is even a case to answer. Moreover, so far as I know, these voices never said anything that was at all paranormal, in the sense of being true but unknown to the children.

The way Mr Playfair presents his data is, as I have pointed out, somewhat chaotic, and the absence of an index in his book makes it hard to trace any particular theme or person. At times the writing is positively confusing. Just by reading the book it is impossible to form an accurate picture of the precise course of the investigation. For instance, I took physicist Dave Robertson of Birkbeck College, University of London, and some video equipment (by arrangement with Professor Hasted, head of the physics department at Birkbeck) up to Enfield on 15 January 1978. Yet *This house is haunted* gives no clear picture of what was or was not achieved that night, using the monitoring equipment. Towards the end of his book Mr Playfair tells his readers that it was decided to set up video equipment so that the bedroom could be

Below: psychical researcher and lecturer Anita Gregory. As a council member of the SPR, she visited Enfield – and was not impressed with what she saw, believing the children to be enjoying themselves fooling the investigators – although the case may indeed have had paranormal origins

viewed without the girls' knowledge. He then goes on to say:

> It seemed like a great idea at the time, but it was a total flop. No sooner were Maurice [Grosse] and David [Robertson] out of the house than Janet hopped out of bed for no apparent reason and peered through the keyhole of the back bedroom, and by a particularly unfortunate coincidence the TV monitor and revolving recorder reel happened to be in direct line with the keyhole. Janet saw them and . . . realised we were playing a trick on her. So nothing happened. Janet later told me she had suspected our trick at once.

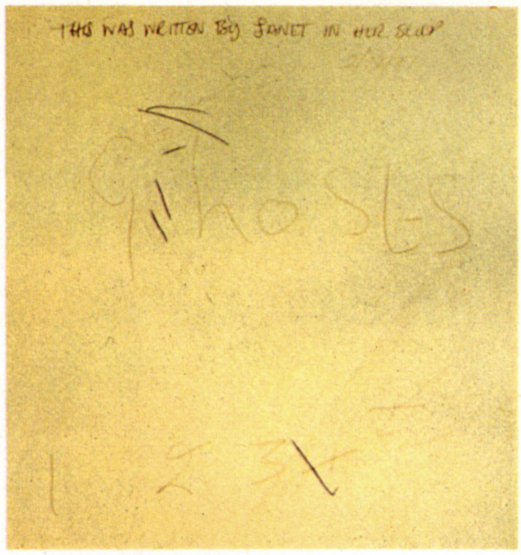
We finally decided that Janet had to

> get out of the house. . . . She left home on 16 June 1978. . . .

Did they really wait until June 1978 before trying to monitor the bedroom where most of the poltergeist activity was supposed to take place? And what of the video recording that Dave Robertson took *before* Janet knew he was doing so, and in which she can be seen bending a spoon and trying to bend a thick metal bar in a thoroughly normal manner – by force – and then bouncing up and down on the bed making little flapping movements with both hands?

Mr John Burcombe, Mrs Harper's brother, and Mrs Nottingham, a neighbour, with both of whom I frequently had long talks, seemed to me to be sensible and reliable witnesses. On 23 December 1977 Mr Burcombe told me that he thought that Janet had taught herself how to talk in a deep voice,

Right: the word 'ghosts' and some numbers written by Janet 'in her sleep'. Automatic, or dissociated, writing is not in itself proof that the writer is psychic, and this, say some critics, is not even proof that Janet was asleep as claimed



Below: Matthew Manning – himself once a poltergeist victim – visits the Harpers. He gave them sympathy but, as something of a 'psychic superstar', his interest might have encouraged the children to prolong their case by faking the phenomena

and that she thoroughly enjoyed misleading strangers (like most mischievous children). On 15 January 1978 I had a talk with Mrs Nottingham, who told me that she thought that what was going on at that time was 'pure nonsense', and only being kept going by the interest of the investigators. But she stressed over and over again Maurice Grosse's great kindness towards the family, to which I myself can also testify. He was almost like a father to them, taking an interest in the children's homework, helping with holidays, for example. I made notes of these conversations at the time and, within a few days, circulated them in reports to various colleagues to ensure that there would be a contemporary record of them. Mr Grosse now says that in 1981 Mr Burcombe and Mrs Nottingham denied that they ever said these things to me. I am afraid we will just have to leave this as a clash of testimony.

Mr Grosse also claimed that Mr Playfair had presented 'abundant evidence' for paranormal happenings in the Enfield case. As I see it, he has done nothing of the kind. What he has done is to produce a readable and entertaining book containing assorted claims (of varying degrees of persuasiveness), but it is, as I wrote in my review of it in the SPR's *Journal*, 'far too sketchy, impressionistic, unsystematic, imprecise, ambiguous, and confusing, to be seen as a contribution to *research*'.

In challenging my views of the Enfield case in a letter to the SPR's *Journal*, Mr Grosse even went so far as to suggest that I was not prepared to admit the very existence of the phenomena that the SPR was founded to study. Now I believe that this is a total and important misunderstanding, of both my own position and that of the society.

To start with the lesser of these two: I personally have been one of the earliest and most persistent exponents of the view that many members, even including the founders, of the SPR have been at fault in belittling – to an unreasonable degree – some very sound evidence for physical phenomena. I have made no secret of this view, and have frequently expressed this in print. Specifically, as regards Mr Playfair's book, I wrote that it 'does provide testimony which I personally accept as being sincere, and some of which it is reasonable to accept as competent, for paranormal movement of objects, particularly in the earlier phases of the case'. Mr Grosse does not improve his case by attributing to me views contrary to those I have often expressed. In fact, I do consider that there is, on record, good evidence for the existence of physical phenomena – but not in the Enfield case. It is precisely because the matter is of some importance, particularly to those who think that there is a good case for physical paranormality to be made, that poor cases should not be paraded as good ones.

There is, as regards the Enfield case, a certain amount of testimony – some of it quite impressive and reassuring – but there is no real *evidence*. And, above all, there is no convincing analysis of the alleged phenomena that would be acceptable to a critical and careful psychical researcher.

Further reading

Renée Haynes, *The Society for Psychical Research, 1882–1982: a history*, Macdonald 1982
T.K. Oesterreich, *Possession, demoniacal and other*, University Books 1966
Guy Lyon Playfair, *This house is haunted*, Sphere Books 1981

Post script

Your letters to THE UNEXPLAINED

Dear Sir,
I should like to tell you about a strange experience I had many years ago, when I was a child.

My mother was not a religious person and it was therefore a complete surprise to me when she took me to a confirmation service at the parish church on Miln Gree, Wargrave, near where we lived. We sat in the nave, on the aisle that ran up to the chancel. The Bishop's throne was situated obliquely across the aisle at the chancel end, with the choir stalls just behind it.

After the first part of the service, the candidates – most of whom were girls – formed two lines before the Bishop. It was then that I noticed what I thought were two men coming down the aisle from the altar. They were dressed like choirmen. The one on the right was old and rather bent. He came straight down, passed around the Bishop and two kneeling girls and placed himself at the Bishop's left side. The other man, who was rather sturdier than the first, came about halfway down the choir stall, turned right and stood for a minute looking into the face of one of the choristers. They were only about 10 inches [25 centimetres] apart, but did not appear to be speaking. When the man turned away he had a beautiful smile on his face; he placed himself on the Bishop's right hand side.

The men waited until the two kneeling girls got up and two more knelt down, then they took hold of the Bishop's wrists and lifted his hands to the girls' heads. After prayers were said they moved the Bishop's hands back to his sides – then they simply disappeared.

I said nothing to my mother when we came out of church, but she went straight over to some other women and said: 'Did you see those saints take the Bishop's wrists and place his hands on the girls' heads?' The women had not seen this happen, but an old lady at the back of the crowd came forward saying: 'That is the third time I have seen that vision. I told my son, but he would not believe me.' Mother agreed to go with her to tell her son what she had seen.

It appeared we were the only three people who saw the vision. There was no mention of the incident in the parish as far as I know. I should very much regret this story being lost; it is just possible that the lady may have written about her experience and the document is still in the possession of her family. I should be very interested to discover if anyone is able to corroborate what I have written.
Yours faithfully,
W.H. Digweed Kemsing, Kent

Dear Sir,
In June 1958 I was a deckhand on board the steam trawler *Bon Accord* working out of Aberdeen. On this particular trip we were working at the Flannan Isles. We were towing a trawl in thick fog. I was sitting on the foredeck near the stem of the vessel when, at about 11 a.m., I saw a three-masted sailing boat upside down in the water. I called out to the captain, but he ignored me. I saw this ship for nearly one hour – then it vanished.

Exactly 24 hours later, while on watch in the wheelhouse, I heard the sound of engines. Then sharp on the starboard bow I saw the shape of a trawler, steaming ahead at full speed. I hauled the wheel hard round, and the motor trawler cleared our stem by a matter of feet. The name of the ship was the *Red Hackle*.

At the time I did not know what to make of these incidents. But, exactly one year later, the *Red Hackle* ran aground on the island of Tiree.
Yours faithfully,
Alex McKay Jr Portsoy, Scotland

Dear Sir,
Your series on Borley Rectory prompts me to tell you about a visit I paid there in, I think, 1965.

Three colleagues and I had formed a ghost investigation group and we decided to visit the site of Borley. We knew the rectory no longer existed but, intrigued by newspaper reports of the appearance of a ghostly nun, we set off to spend the night in the vicinity of Borley.

There were four of us, including a sceptical Scot who declared, 'There's no such thing as a ghost.' He came along to ensure that we didn't tell any tall stories later.

When we arrived at Borley, I spoke to a man who said his house was built on part of the old rectory garden. He said that he didn't believe in the 'supernatural' and that the only thing that had happened that could be called remotely odd was the discovery of a human skull when the foundations of his house were being prepared.

One of my companions decided to sleep in the car, while the rest of us sat in the porch of the church. When dawn came at last nothing had happened, and one of my friends, David, walked off down the road to watch the Sun come up. This left me with the Scotsman, Jock. David had been gone only about two minutes when Jock, pointing towards the edge of the graveyard, said: 'What's David doing over there?'

I told Jock that I could see a tall pine tree, the graveyard wall and a gravestone, but not David. He grew very angry and said that David was standing right next to the tree, wearing a bushy black beard (David was clean shaven) and a long black buttoned coat, and had a pipe in his mouth (David was a non-smoker). Jock strode over to the tree in a temper, demanding that David show himself.

At that moment David returned from the opposite direction and asked what all the fuss was about. Jock accused him of playing a trick and of hiding the disguise he had been wearing.

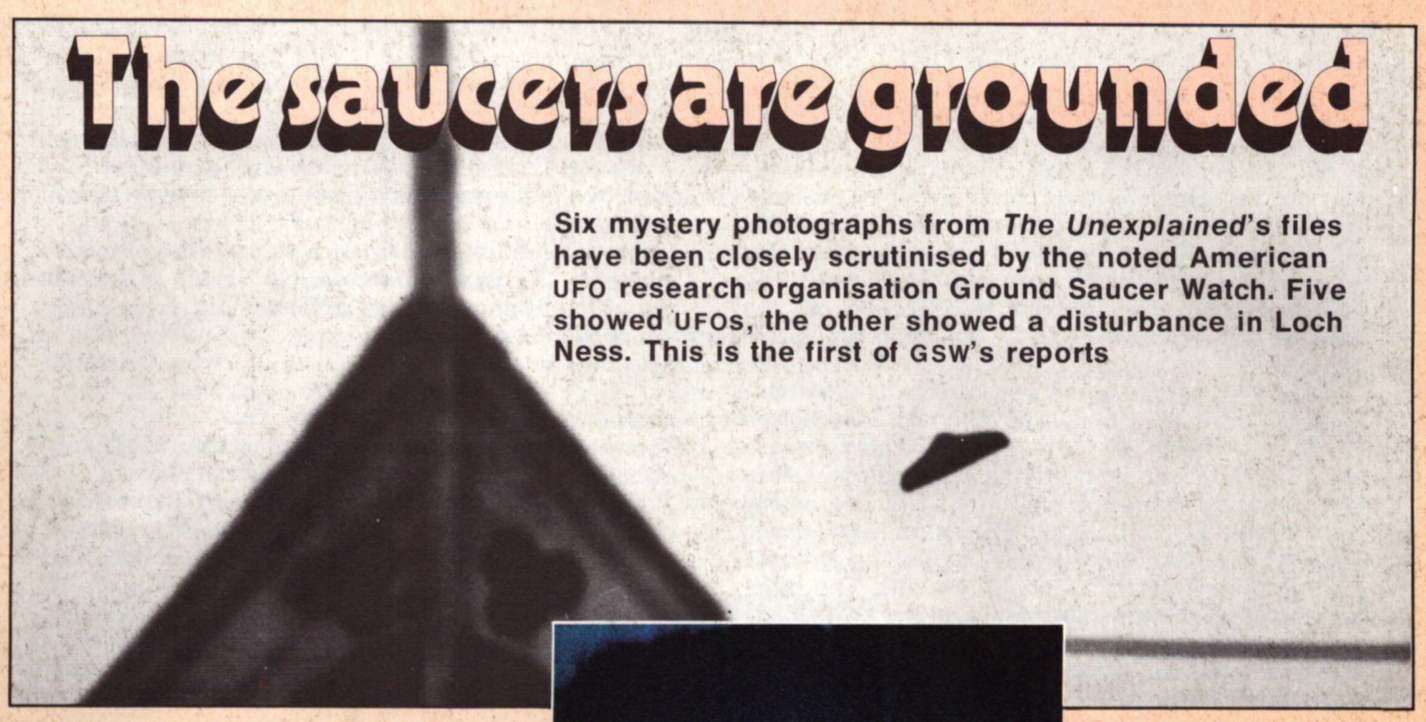
It was obvious to the rest of us that David could not have hidden anything; he had had nothing with him in the car and had been with us all the time except for his walk.

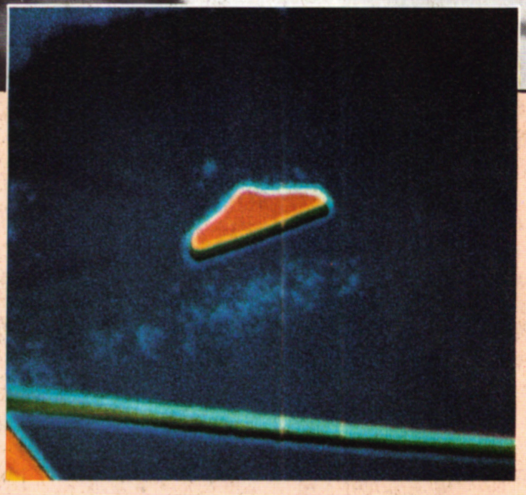
I believe Jock saw the apparition of one of the Bulls, rectors at Borley in the past. I tried to explain to Jock that it is possible for one person to see a ghost while another does not, but he refused to accept this. He left our little association still saying that we had tricked him in some way and refusing to have anything more to do with us.
Yours faithfully,
V. Neville-Statham London

Send *your* letters to THE UNEXPLAINED, Orbis House, 20–22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT

The saucers are grounded

Six mystery photographs from *The Unexplained*'s files have been closely scrutinised by the noted American UFO research organisation Ground Saucer Watch. Five showed UFOs, the other showed a disturbance in Loch Ness. This is the first of GSW's reports

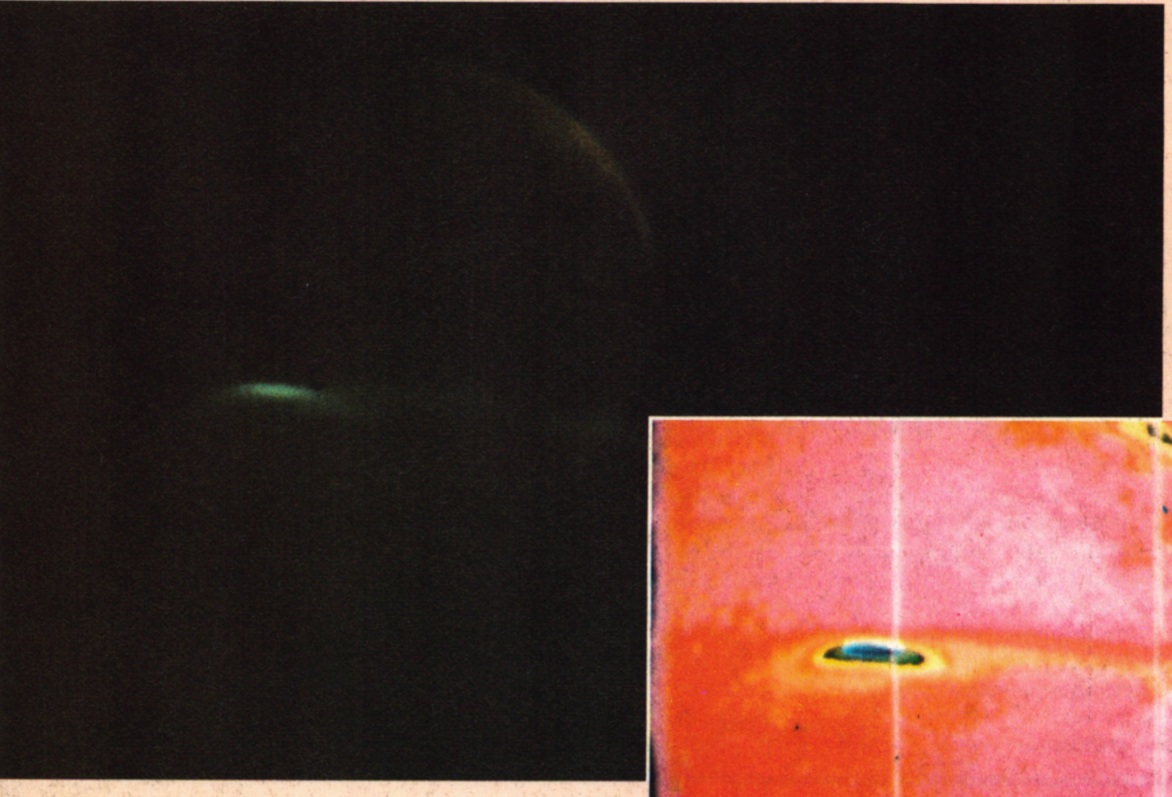
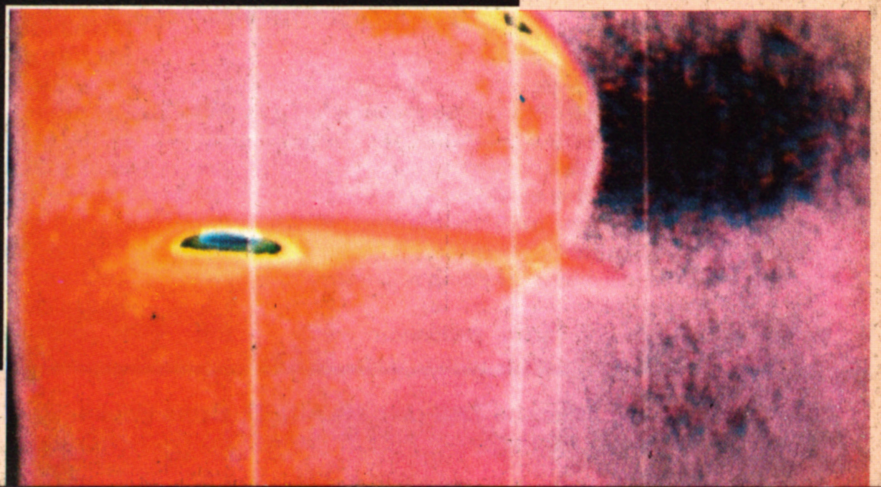




Above: one of 12 photographs taken on 15 December 1966 in south-west London by Anthony Russell (see page 1878). Four of the pictures showed a dark silhouette. A computer was used to analyse the variations of density (darkness) in the image. GSW concluded that the object was extremely small and close to the camera. In their view it was a paper cut-out pasted on the window

Right: a false-colour computerised version of the picture. The evenness of the UFO's red colour indicates that it is a flat object

Below left: the Moon, photographed through a telescope, or possibly a very powerful telephoto lens – and in the foreground a green disc with a tenuous trail. This picture was sent by a reader who disclosed no further details



Below: in a computerised image the variations in brightness and darkness of the picture have been turned into colour, thus clarifying the image somewhat. But GSW had little to work on, owing to the poor contrast and excessive graininess of the picture and the paucity of information about it. Nevertheless, they concluded that the 'UFO' was actually due to a crimp in the film, probably caused when it was developed. The 'bump' in the film is actually visible in some lights